

Sermon for Proper 14B – August 12, 2018
Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio
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TO BE LIKE JESUS

Last weekend, Martha and I went to Houston to visit her brother and his family. We really enjoyed being together. However, we did NOT enjoy Houston traffic... and we thought the loops in San Antonio were difficult when we first arrived. We traveled to Galveston and spent a day by the water. There was a slight breeze which served to lessen the humidity and we ate lunch on the deck of a restaurant watching the passengers arrive to board their ship for a cruise. It was a beautiful day all around. On Sunday, we tried to google churches where we could comfortably arrive and worship in community. Too many had “buzz” words that we translated as “probably not for us”... so, we made our way home without the worship we had hoped to experience.

It got me to thinking about how we find churches to call home. This summer we have been listening to one another’s stories about finding Reconciliation and stories of our founders who established this amazing spiritual home to be found by those of us who have come over the past fifty years.

This inclusive, welcoming, and caring way of being, I believe is a hallmark, a charism, really, of our life here in this community of faith. Reconciliation is a spiritual family who celebrates and grieves with one another, whose identity is rooted and grounded in the inclusive love of God in Jesus Christ. Reconciliation strives to remain open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in new and radical ways of seeking and serving Christ in all people and loving our neighbors as ourselves. This is our way of life and it is the Way of Jesus we commit to follow.

Let’s also be honest. How difficult is it really, on a Sunday morning, to come to church and smile at people, to greet others as they take their places around you in the pews? How taxing is it, to move around at the Peace and extend your peace to those seated near you or in the other sections of pews around this sacred table? Extending the Peace of the Lord is much more difficult when there has been some difficulty, some alienating circumstance, some uncomfortable words exchanged, or hurtful actions that have made the sharing of the Peace a moment of avoidance or casting one’s eyes downward even as one’s hand is extended forward. Now we have all been there, and maybe, just maybe, you are in that very place of *dis*-ease with another person in this congregation today.

The truth be told, being welcoming, hospitable, and seeking peace among even those of us here this morning does not happen without its difficulties, resistance and even avoidance. It’s why, I believe, we need reminders of exactly what Jesus desires from those, like us, who would make every sincere effort not simply to follow him, but more honestly, to be like him. *To Be Like Jesus* takes intentional commitment, self-awareness, prayer, spiritual discipline and practice. Yes, practice, practice, practice.

An open Eucharistic table such as this one, speaks about the non-negotiable values and spiritual disciplines of this Christian community. One has only to come to a Sunday service of Holy Eucharist and listen to the words of invitation:

This is the table of the Lord. It is made ready for those who love and those who want to love more. So, come, you who have much faith and you who have little, you who have been here often, and you who have not been here long; you who have tried to follow, and you who have fallen short. Come, because it is the Risen Christ who invites you. It is the Risen Christ who wants to meet you here.

From the first time I heard this prayer to the last time I prayed it among you, I am humbled by its truth and power. This prayer says boldly... *everyone* is welcome to this table, just as you are, where all are fed, nourished, blessed, healed, forgiven, renewed and sent forth to be like the One we receive. All who dare to extend their out-stretched hands to receive the bread of life and the cup of salvation are being transformed and sent from this place to become more and more like the One receive. Is that what you desire most in your life- to actually, **BE LIKE JESUS?** What might that look like the other six days of the week for you? What does it look like **TO BE LIKE JESUS** in your home, in your workplace, in the grocery store, as you drive your car, as you encounter a stranger along the street?

For the last three Sundays and for the next two, our Gospel texts in this liturgical year B of the Revised Common Lectionary are taken from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John. The chapter begins with the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, the only miracle of Jesus included in all four Gospels followed by the miracle of Jesus walking on the water as the disciples' boat is caught in a terrible storm.

Insatiable hunger, horrific fear. We have all been there at one time or another, I believe. And we live in a world of insatiable appetites in which, *too often*, we choose work over family and other intimate relationships, we hide our deepest hunger and fears not only from one another, and even more importantly and potentially more destructively, from ourselves.

Like Jesus' disciples when faced with five thousand hungry people and too little food, or so they thought... we, too, can find ourselves looking the other way, finding reasons, good reasons why we cannot take the time to help, or thinking how little difference our meager efforts would make, anyway.

And when we look in the mirror, how often do we see the fear that continues to haunt us, or the dream unfulfilled, the anger we harbor toward another, the insatiable hunger and unquenchable thirst we have carried with us for so long.

For me, and for any of you who have found yourself in that very place, the sixth chapter of John's Gospel addresses each of our fears, concerns, doubts, and deepest hunger. It is a text in

which people just like you and me get to ask their questions of Jesus. “Where are we to buy bread for all these people?” “What must we do to perform the works of God?” “What sign will you give us so that we may see it and believe in you?”

Or questions like:

“What is the most loving thing I can do in this situation?” “How can I forgive after all this time?” “What if *I* make the call?”

My friends, what are your questions for Jesus?

These questions of our hearts are ones that Jesus honors for sure and *through* those questions, he calls us to deeper relationship with him.

So we hear him say *to us...*

*To each of you who hungers... **I AM the bread of Life.***

*To each of you who lives in fear and in the shadows... **I AM the Light of the world.***

*To each of you who is held hostage... **I AM the door.***

*To each of you who is lost, directionless, estranged... **I AM the Good Shepherd.***

*To each of you who has faced death of one kind or another... **I AM Resurrection and I AM Life.***

*To each of you who feel abandoned or betrayed. **I AM the true Vine.***

My friends, in this one chapter of John’s Gospel, you and I are found by Jesus, fed by Jesus, claimed by Jesus, liberated by Jesus, redeemed by Jesus! Not once but *once and for all!*

Even today, you and I are invited to this table with some sense of fear, hunger, estrangement, resentment, despair, hopelessness harbored in our hearts and we hear in John’s gospel, the invitation to hunger and thirst no more as we are invited to this sacred feast of bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Jesus, the Risen Christ, who wants to meet you here.

And so, we make our prayer:

May we who share Christ’s body live his risen life.

We who drink his cup bring life to others.

We whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.

(The New Zealand Prayer Book, p. 428)

In the name of I AM, we pray.

Amen.